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AUTHOR Berg, John H.: Archer, Richard L.
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ABSTRACT

Several theoretical approaches have been offered to explain the phenomenon of reciprocity: trust-liking, social exchange, and modeling. The emphasis of previous research on self-disclosure reciprocity (descriptive reciprocation), the intimacy of the facts an individual reveals about him- or herself, stems largely from the fact that these investigations have structured the circumstances for disclosure in terms of the exchange of information. It was hypothesized that if the circumstances were changed to a conversation or if participants were concerned with increasing their attractiveness to another, other forms of reciprocity including affective reciprocity, the strength of the emotions revealed, the topical reciprocity, the degree to which a response addresses topics previously raised, might be more pronounced. Results from an experiment varying the circumstances for disclosure and the intimacy of disclosure initially received from an experimental confederate indicated that the structural differences between information exchanges and conversations was a major determinant of topical reciprocity. Affective reciprocity was influenced primarily by the desire to increase one's attractiveness. (Author)

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The Nature of Disclosure Reciprocity:

Three Forms of Reciprocation.

John H. Berg

The University of California, Los Angeles

Richard L. Archer

The University of Texas at Austin

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Paper presented at the 88th Convention of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada,

The Nature of Disclosure Reciprocity: Three Forms of Reciprocation

John H. Berg
The University of California
Los Angeles

Richard L. Archer
The University of Texas
at Austin

Abstract

It was proposed that the emphasis of previous investigations of self-disclosure reciprocity on descriptive reciprocation, the intimacy of the facts an individual reveals about him- or herself, stems largely from the fact that these investigations have structured the circumstances for disclosure in terms of the exchange of information. If the circumstances were changed to a conversation or if participants were concerned with increasing their attractiveness to another, other forms of reciprocity including affective reciprocity, the strength of the emotions revealed, and topical reciprocity, the degree to which a response addresses topics previously raised, might be more pronounced.

An experiment varying the circumstances for disclosure and the intimacy of disclosure initially received from an experimental confederate indicated that the structural difference between information exchanges and conversations was a major determinant of topical reciprocity while affective reciprocity was primarily influenced by the desire to increase one's attractiveness. Results are discussed in terms of the existing theories of disclosure reciprocity and the concept of responsiveness.

The Nature of Disclosure Reciprocity:
Three Forms of Reciprocation

Despite numerous demonstrations of disclosure reciprocity (e.g. Archer & Berg, 1978; Cozby, 1972; Derlega & Chaikin, 1976; Derlega, Harris & Chaikin, 1973; Ehrlich & Graeven, 1971; Worthy, Gary & Kahn, 1969), we have only minimal understanding of those factors which cause reciprocity. Three basic theoretical approaches have been offered to explain the phenomenon (cf. Archer, 1979); a trust-liking approach (e.g. Jourard, 1959; Worthy et al., 1969), a social exchange approach (e.g. Chaikin & Derlega, 1974; Derlega et al., 1973), and a modeling approach (Rubin, 1973, 1975). In reviewing the theoretical approaches, Altman (1973) noted that no viewpoint was well developed either theoretically or empirically. More recently, Berg and Archer (in press) maintained that further progress in understanding reciprocity would require a more detailed analysis of what was in fact being reciprocated in an exchange of disclosures. The present experiment attempts to provide such an analysis.

Several recent studies (Berg & Archer, in press; Davis & Perkowitz, 1979; Morton, 1978) suggest some of the different forms reciprocation may take. Morton distinguished descriptive from evaluative intimacy. Descriptive intimacy refers to the intimacy of the facts an individual reveals about him- or herself while evaluative intimacy refers to the strength of the affect revealed. Employing these two dimensions, Berg

and Archer found that their observer subjects were more attracted to a disclosure recipient who replied with a statement of concern (high evaluative intimacy) as compared to a statement of either high or low descriptive intimacy. In explaining these results, Berg and Archer suggest that the preference for the concern statement resulted from the fact that in addition to evaluative intimacy, it also expressed the willingness of the respondent to discuss the issues raised by the initial revealer (i.e. topical reciprocity). Finally, Davis and Perkowitz found that subjects were more attracted to a respondent who reciprocated topically by subsequently choosing to answer the same questions they had previously answered than to one who chose to answer different questions.

Given the above findings it may appear somewhat surprising that other investigations of disclosure reciprocity have focused almost exclusively on the descriptive intimacy of a reply. The reason may lie with the nature of the typical self-disclosure experiment. Typically, subjects are told that the study involves impression formation and that their task is to describe themselves in such a way that their partner will be able to form an accurate impression of them (e.g. Jones & Archer, 1976). This may place a premium on the revelation of facts which is not ordinarily present in interactions. In terms of the distinctions drawn by Jones and Thibaut (1958), the typical self-disclosure study would be viewed as a noncontingent interaction in which the behavior of participants is governed by role requirements, in this case the conveyance of information, rather than reciprocally contingent interactions in which behavior is determined by the preceding behavior of the other. Thus

differences in the amount of descriptive intimacy contained in a reply (descriptive reciprocity), the amount of evaluative intimacy (affective reciprocity), and the degree of topical reciprocity might be obtained by altering the structure of the interaction from an information exchange to a conversation.

In addition, Jones and Thibaut note that persons in reciprocally contingent interactions are more likely to have being liked by the other as their goal, thus providing a motivational as well as a structural basis for differences in the amounts of various forms of reciprocation. The present study seeks to explore the effects of such structural and motivational factors in predisposing subjects to reciprocate either descriptively, affectively, or topically.

Method

Subjects: Seventy-eight female undergraduates drawn from introductory psychology classes at the University of Texas at Austin participated as subjects with one of two same-sex confederates. Six of these were deleted from the final data analysis due to their suspicion of the authenticity of the confederate or her remarks. The remaining subjects were randomly assigned to one of the cells of the 2 (confederate intimacy) by 3 (interaction goal) design, with the stipulation that an equal number of subjects participate in each condition. Each of the two confederates participated with an equal number of subjects in each condition.

Procedure: Upon arrival at the lab, subjects were initially introduced to their confederate partner and seated in front of a TV camera and monitor, by means of which they were to communicate with their partner. The confederate was then taken to another room and ostensibly seated in

front of similar equipment.

Manipulation of Interaction Goal: In all conditions it was explained that the subject's partner had been chosen 'by chance' to speak first and that to get things started she had been asked to choose any two topics from a list of twenty-five which she wanted to talk about in terms of her own experiences. In the Information Exchange conditions, the experimenter employed the typical instructions used for self-disclosure experiments. The study was described as an investigation of impression formation and the experimenter requested that they choose their remarks in such a way that their partner would be able to form an accurate impression of them. In the Conversation conditions, the study was introduced as an investigation of conversations and the experimenter suggested that they call to mind other conversations they had in the past when choosing their remarks. The Conversation plus liking instructions were identical to the Conversation condition except that the experimenter made the additional request that the subject concentrate on creating a favorable impression.

Manipulation of Confederate Intimacy: The experimenter left ostensibly to turn on the confederate's TV camera. In reality, subjects viewed a videotape of the confederate discussing some aspects of her relationship with her sister and her ups and downs in mood. In the High Intimacy conditions she discussed her feelings about the death of her sister and characterized herself as a rather moody person. In the Low Intimacy conditions she discussed the living arrangements she shared with her sister at the university and noted that she did not consider herself to be a moody person.

When the videotape ended, the experimenter gave the subjects an additional two minutes to prepare what they wished to say and at this time reinstated the instruction set. Then the subject's camera was turned on and she was allowed two minutes to speak to her partner.

Dependent Measures: The subject's remarks were recorded on audiotape by the confederate from an adjoining room. These audiotapes were subsequently transcribed and rated by six judges blind to experimental conditions and hypotheses for descriptive and evaluative intimacy. The method employed by Morton (1978) was adapted for this purpose. Judges rated every two typewritten lines of a subject's transcript as (1) high or low in descriptive intimacy and (2) high or low in evaluative intimacy. Judges were later provided with copies of the two scripts employed by the confederates and instructed to note whether or not the subjects had referred to a topic brought up by the confederate in a given two-line segment. (Each of these segments is hereafter referred to as a subject statement.)

The proportion of statements rated by each judge as high in descriptive and evaluative intimacy and as referring to something the confederate had said was computed for each subject. For all three ratings inter-rater reliability was found to be high (all alphas $\geq .85$). Consequently, the average proportion of statements rated as high in descriptive intimacy, evaluative intimacy, and as dealing with a topic initially raised by the confederate were used as the measures of descriptive, affective, and topical reciprocity respectively.

In addition to these primary measures subjects indicated the degree they liked their partner, wanted to know her better, and would like her

as a close friend. Answers to these three questions were summed with ratings of the partner on six bipolar adjectives (immature - mature, maladjusted - well-adjusted, phony - genuine, insensitive - sensitive, closed - open, and cold - warm), to form an index of the degree to which they were attracted to their partner (alpha = .84).

Finally subjects were also asked to rate the intimacy of the confederate's disclosure. Responses to all questions were made on 10 point bipolar scales with end points appropriately labeled.

Results and Discussion

As expected, subjects viewed the confederates' remarks as being more intimate in the high intimacy conditions than in the low intimacy conditions; $F(1, 66) = 65.38$, $p < .001$. In addition, analysis of the judges' ratings of the two scripts indicated that they differed in terms of both descriptive and evaluative intimacy, $F(1, 4) = 20.87$, $p < .01$; and $F(1, 4) = 26.20$, $p < .007$, respectively, thus providing further validation of the intimacy manipulation.

Reciprocation Measures: Cell means for the proportion of subject statements rated as high in descriptive intimacy are presented in Table 1. Analysis of variance performed on these ratings revealed an effect of borderline significance for the interaction goal variable: $F(2, 66) = 2.46$, $p < .10$. Planned comparisons revealed that as expected there was a greater amount of descriptive reciprocation in the Information Exchange condition than in the Conversation conditions, $F(1, 66) = 4.38$, $p < .04$; and marginally more than in the Conversation plus liking conditions, $F(1, 66) = 2.57$, $p < .12$. In addition, a highly significant main effect for confederate intimacy was found, $F(1, 66) = 10.10$, $p < .002$,

replicating traditional matching reciprocity findings.

Cell means for the proportion of statements seen as high in evaluative intimacy are presented in Table 2. The main effect for confederate intimacy is again significant, $F(1, 66) = 19.30$, $p < .001$. Subjects' replies contained a greater proportion of evaluatively intimate statements when these replies were addressed to an intimate as compared to a non-intimate partner. The interaction between interaction goal and confederate intimacy, $F(2, 66) = 3.46$, $p < .04$ indicated that the intimacy effect occurred primarily within the Conversation and Conversation plus liking conditions. Finally a main effect for interaction goal was also found, $F(2, 66) = 3.91$, $p < .03$. Apparently, the desire to increase one's attractiveness is of primary importance in creating affective reciprocation, because the Conversation plus liking condition differed from both the Information Exchange [$F(1, 66) = 3.16$, $p < .08$] and Conversation [$F(1, 66) = 7.61$, $p < .007$] conditions, but the later two conditions did not differ from each other, $F < 1$.

Analysis of the proportion of subject statements exhibiting topical reciprocity yielded a highly significant effect for the interaction goal variable, $F(2, 66) = 15.38$, $p < .001$. Cell means appear in Table 3. That the structural factor of Information Exchange vs. Conversation is the primary determinant of topical reciprocity is suggested by the finding that while the Conversation and Conversation plus liking conditions failed to differ from each other, $F < 1$, they both differed from the Information Exchange condition, $F(1, 66) = 19.64$, $p < .001$ and $F(1, 66) = 26.05$, $p < .001$, respectively.

While the purpose of this paper was not to perform crucial tests of

the existing theories of reciprocity or to pit them against each other, it is nevertheless appropriate at this point to evaluate the theories in terms of the finer grained analysis of reciprocity performed here. In general, none of the theories does well in terms of the total pattern of data. The trust-liking explanation (Jourard, 1959; Worthy et al., 1969), which predicts a strong positive relation between the amount of liking for an initial revealer and the amount of reciprocation is hurt by the failure to find such a relationship between liking for the partner and either descriptive or affective reciprocation in the present study. Only topical reciprocity shows any correlation with attraction, and it does not reach significance ($r = .21$, $p < .09$ two-tailed).

The modeling approach (Rubin, 1973, 1975) views reciprocity as resulting from attempts by subjects to reduce the risks involved in an ambiguous situation by modeling the behavior of an initial revealer. The suggestion to call to mind past conversations given in the Conversation and Conversation plus liking conditions should have resulted in the experimental situation becoming less ambiguous for subjects in these conditions. Thus a reduced need to model another's behavior might be expected. Nevertheless it was the Conversation and Conversation plus liking conditions which led to the greatest amounts of topical and affective reciprocation.

The social exchange approach holds that reciprocity occurs in an attempt to discharge the obligation imposed by the receipt of another's disclosure. In its present form, however, it does not explain why different forms of reciprocation would become more or less pronounced when subjects had been given different instruction sets. Nor does it explain

why topical reciprocation should fail to show increases which the heightened obligation increased intimacy from the other should impose.

An alternative approach to the above theories is to view disclosure reciprocity as an attempt on the part of the participants in an interaction to demonstrate responsiveness toward one another's actions and goals. Viewed in this way, the types of reciprocity distinguished here are only three of a vast number of ways, both verbal and nonverbal, in which responsiveness may be conveyed (see Davis & Perkowitz, 1979, and Mehrabian, 1972, for other discussions of responsiveness). The emphasis on descriptive reciprocation found in the self-disclosure literature results, at least in part, from the fact that this may be the only way a disclosure recipient may indicate responsiveness while at the same time satisfying the implicit demand to transmit self-information. When this demand is removed, as it is in everyday conversations or on occasions when persons attempt to maximize their attractiveness, other ways of indicating responsiveness (e.g. topical or affective reciprocation) may become more effective.

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Table 1

Descriptive Reciprocation

	Instruction Set		
	Information Exchange	Conversation	Conversation plus liking
Low Confederate Intimacy	.26	.14	.16
High Confederate Intimacy	.31	.26	.28

Note: $n = 12$ per cell

Table 2

Affective Reciprocation

	Instruction Set		
	Information Exchange	Conversation	Conversation plus liking
Low Confederate Intimacy	.25	.17	.22
High Confederate Intimacy	.28	.29	.44

Note: $\underline{n}$ = 12 per cell

Table 3

Topical Reciprocation

	Instruction Set		
	Information Exchange	Conversation	Conversation plus liking
Low Confederate Intimacy	.52	.83	.82
High Confederate Intimacy	.56	.77	.86

Note: n = 12 per cell